

See other
enclosure

Langmuir
Dear Mott,
Sent off a letter to you
yesterday but knowing
your broad interest I
thought you might be
interested in this
reminiscence of
the early 1950's.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mark Wheelis
Barbara Hatch Rosenberg

From: Alex Langmuir

Subject: Early publications on BW theory

Any.
I think you have two
references already.
February 4, 1991
(if not I'll send
them as if you so
indicate.)

Both of you in recent letters have made specific requests to receive copies of the two papers I prepared back in 1950-51 on BW theory as an effort to achieve broader professional and even public understanding of the essential nature of BW and its defense. These are:

1. The Potentialities of BW against Man, an Epidemiological Appraisal. Public Health Reports 1951, 66: 387-99, and
2. Biological Warfare Defense (with Justin M Andrews) Amer J. Pub Heal, 1952, (March) vol 42.

These have an interesting history in that they were written during my quite early days at CDC, but I was in a most strategic position at the time.

From early 1947 I had served, as Kenneth Maxcy's alternate, on a high level Top Secret Committee on Biological Warfare, of the Joint Research and Development Board, of the National Military Establishment (that soon became the Department of Defense). In that year we had completed a quite authoritative treatise done by a stellar panel (RE Dyer, Director NIH, John Enders, John Dingle, et al) which concluded that BW presented a distinct threat to the USA and recommended a continuation and major expansion of the BW R&D program, both offensive and defensive, at then Camp Detrick and Dugway. In spite of strong urging on the part of most of us the report was never declassified but at the same time became a major basis for the decision to expand the BW program.

Beginning in the fall of 1949, shortly after joining CDC, I was appointed to the Chemical Corps Advisory Committee that met three times a year and covered all three areas of unconventional warfare, so-called ABC, atomic meaning radiological contamination, biological and chemical. The Chief Chemical Officer met with us consistently. At that time it was Tony McAuliffe, of "Nuts"

Bastogne fame. He was attentive, listened and respectful.

In the summer of 1950 shortly after the outbreak of the Korea War, the SG of the PHS appointed RE Dyer and me to the BW committee of the Federal Civil Defense Administration in the Office of the President. We were charged with preparing a civil defense manual for the nation. The subject was of deep concern not only because of the short time since the end of WW II but because that fall the Chinese had launched an intense propaganda campaign charging the USA with using BW in Korea. This was reputedly having a dire effect throughout the Third World.

The first paper was prepared as a contribution toward a better understanding of the nature of BW and a plea for the medical and microbiological profession to cease its highly effective boycott even from discussing it. It assiduously avoided any reference to classified data. Since it was prepared for the Civil Defense Administration it was submitted directly from the Office of the White House to the Department of Defense for clearance. It therefore went down from the Secretary of Defense to the Chief, Chemical Officer, Tony McAuliffe. He wrote me a personal note of praise, warm approval and full clearance within a week. It's incredible when you think of how long it takes to obtain clearance now.

This was most fortuitous because had it gone through channels from the bottom up almost certainly it would have met opposition from routine security classification officers, not because it contained secret information but because the whole construction of ideas would be thought "too dangerous to release."

The second paper speaks for itself. It was designed as the most elementary possible statement for the benefit of the rank and file members of the APHA and therefore for the general public. It was an heroic effort to demystify BW and bring it into the realm of understanding of everyone, and to plead for a small measure of intelligent preparedness. It received front page coverage in the San Francisco press and elsewhere and favorable editorial attention but had, to my knowledge, no permanent impact. The whole civil defense program atrophied to complete inanition. The Surgeon General's Office of the Army continued its complete hostility not only to the Chemical Corps but its deep psychiatric rejection to the concept of BW in any form. The medical and microbiological professions continued their almost total apathy toward the subject and even ostracism of those who took BW seriously.

I read these two papers over now with a wry sad nostalgic smile. I find no need to change or retract any statement. I wonder what significant progress has been made in the past 40 years. I guess the BW Convention of 1972 was good, like the

Geneva Convention of 1926 but at times I can get a bit cynical about these. (Flame throwers are OK but any BW is not)

Now I read the dope articles in the public press which indicate that botulinum toxin and anthrax are the two most seriously considered BW agents that might be used in the Persian Gulf today. These were high on the potential agent list in the 1950s but soon down graded. Tularemia and Q Fever that took high place in the 1960s are not even mentioned now. I sensed, while serving on the Chemical Corps Advisory Council, that truly high level military strategists had no use for BW in any form because it had not been, and presumably would not be, of demonstrated military value. Without the equivalent of a BW Alamagordo few but the hysterical and a small group of "believers" take BW seriously even now. A single proved BW episode, even a small terrorist attack would change all that complacency in a hurry.

If any of you wish to carry on this dialogue further I am most willing for you to mine my rather vivid memory of those days for what I believe may be still quite relevant technical information. I have had no access whatsoever to classified data for more than 20 years. What I know might assist those who are now struggling anew with this whole problem. I doubt that I can release any information that would be of solace the Haddam H.

Enclosures

cc Matthew Meselson

DA Henderson

Alexis Shelokov